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Letter dated 17 May 2000 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I wish to refer to the letter delivered to your office yesterday from the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ireland forwarding a political message from the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in relation to the forthcoming special session of the General Assembly on social development.

As requested by Minister Cowen, I would appreciate if the Minister's letter and the political message could be circulated to the members of the General Assembly.

(*Signed*) Michael **Hoey**
Chargé d'affaires

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Annex to the letter dated 17 May 2000 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Strasbourg, 11 May 2000

It is an honour for me to communicate the attached political message from the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe through you to the General Assembly special session entitled "World Summit for Social Development and beyond: achieving social development for all in a globalizing world" (Geneva, 26-30 June 2000).

In approaching our Chairmanship of the 41-nation organization, Ireland was determined to contribute to upholding the basic principles of democracy, human rights and the rule of law and also to assist in advancing the Council's agenda in a number of key areas. Social cohesion featured as one of the central objectives of our Chairmanship programme, aiming in particular to help promote the social development strategies being elaborated within the Council of Europe.

To further this initiative, Ireland hosted a Council of Europe Conference on Social Development in Dublin in January 2000. This meeting provided the European contribution to the Geneva special session on social development. The Permanent Representative of Ireland to the United Nations presented the results of the Dublin Conference to the United Nations Commission for Social Development in New York. In this respect, allow me to express my satisfaction at this concrete advance in active cooperation between the Council of Europe and the United Nations in the field of social affairs.

The Committee of Ministers looks forward to the special session in Geneva and to examining the outcome with a view to participating in international efforts to promote social cohesion and to address the challenges to social development.

I would appreciate if, for background, this letter could be circulated in association with the political message.

(*Signed*) Brian **Cowen**, T.D.
Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ireland

Enclosure

[Original: English and French]

Towards social development for all: a European strategy based on cooperation and partnership

Political message from the Committee of Ministers to the General Assembly at its special session (Geneva, 26-30 June 2000) adopted by the Committee of Ministers at its 106th session (Strasbourg, 11 May 2000)

The Council of Europe is and remains committed to Social Development. In the five years since the Copenhagen World Summit, European countries have reaffirmed their conviction that social development provides an essential basis for the development of inclusive societies, sound economic growth and the prevention of conflict.

In line with this conviction, the Council of Europe - a pan-European Organisation bringing together 41 states united by their commitment to democracy, respect for human rights, including social rights, and the rule of law - is developing a European Strategy for Social Cohesion as one of its main priorities.

In developing and implementing this Strategy, the Council of Europe draws upon the political determination of its member states to prepare social development policies at national level aimed at promoting active participation in decision-making, fostering civic and social ties, and developing mutually supportive relationships between state, local government, public and private sectors and civil society.

The Council of Europe's Strategy for Social Cohesion aims to accelerate progress towards the achievement of the commitments undertaken at the Copenhagen World Summit. This strategy incorporates the following core elements:

Enabling environment: a common framework of social standards

The European Convention on Human Rights, as well as the relevant legal instruments of the Council of Europe in the social field, in particular the European Social Charter and Revised Social Charter and the European Code of Social Security and Revised Code, protect social rights for everybody without discrimination. Efforts to assist member states in making their legislation compatible with these instruments are being stepped up.

Despite any guarantees offered by states' ratification of legal instruments, there are various obstacles to access to social rights for many people. Therefore, the Council of Europe has set up programmes on access to housing, employment, social protection and health. In this context, particular attention is paid to vulnerable persons or groups at risk of exclusion and to children.

Initiatives aimed at poverty eradication

National strategies against poverty and social exclusion must have clear objectives, targets and monitoring mechanisms. Civil society and people suffering from poverty and social exclusion should be involved in developing such strategies. The Council of Europe has relevant experience to offer in assisting governments further develop such strategies.

The Council of Europe's campaign "Global Interdependence and Solidarity: Europe against Poverty and Social Exclusion" is one of the ongoing efforts of the Organisation to increase awareness of the importance of eradicating poverty in a world-wide context.

Initiatives to promote employment

The Council of Europe is ready to work with the European Union and relevant international organisations to encourage the development of policies to promote employment, particularly as regards access to employment by groups at risk of exclusion. The Council of Europe Development Bank has greatly increased its activity aimed at enhancing social cohesion and promoting employment; it will continue its efforts.

The promotion of social integration

Action to combat all forms of discrimination, notably on grounds of race, ethnicity, gender or age, and to promote equality and equal opportunity, is pursued vigorously by the Council of Europe and these activities will be mainstreamed into the social cohesion strategy, as well as those aimed at the social integration of migrants. Furthermore, in recognition of its competence in this field, the Council of Europe has been entrusted with the preparation of the European contribution to the United Nations' World Conference against Racism and Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and related Intolerance.

As part of its broader commitment to the protection of minorities, the Council of Europe will continue to play a leading role in the development of policies and programmes to enable the Roma population to integrate into European societies on a basis of full equality of treatment and opportunity.

A common agenda on social development

The recent European Conference on Social Development[1] demonstrated the readiness of the Council of Europe and its member states to play an active part in social development. The conference also represented a significant advance in active co-operation between the Council of Europe and the United Nations in this field. In particular, the Council of Europe stands ready to take forward the social development agenda by:

- sharing its experience of developing and implementing standard-setting instruments in the social field with other world regions, bearing in mind the specific situation and resources of each region. To this end, the European Conference on Social Development proposed the organisation of an inter-regional forum on social standards jointly with the United Nations;

- further developing the assessment and measurement of progress in social development and facilitating the exchange of best practice. This requires effective use of indicators and benchmarks for social cohesion through appropriate co-operation between the United Nations and its agencies, the European Union, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the Council of Europe;

- encourage the progressive integration of the goals of the World Summit for Social Development into social and economic development policies at national and international level;

- continuing to participate actively in the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe. Social development is one of the essential components of this comprehensive international effort to promote peace and prosperity and prevent future conflicts in the region.

The Council of Europe will examine the outcome of Geneva 2000 with a view to participating actively in international efforts to take forward the social development agenda.

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1 The Council of Europe organised the European Conference on Social Development in preparation for the Geneva Special Session. The Conference, held in Dublin on 17 and 18 January 2000 at the invitation of the Irish Government, provided an opportunity to assess progress towards social development achieved since the Copenhagen World Summit. Among the proposals taken up in the conclusions of the Chairman of the Conference, several originated from NGOs.